Striking Back

GEO. STREETER was in Paris, because he hoped and expected to meet Alfred Davison there. He knew that Davison was going to be in Paris for at least a fortnight, and he had a particular reason for wishing to come across him in the streets of Paris rather than in the streets of London.

Streeter was a young author who had published several books, and who was getting along as well as could be expected, until suddenly he met a check. The check was only a check as far as his own self-esteem was concerned; for it did not in the least retard the sale of his latest book, but rather appeared to increase it. The check was unexpected, for where he had looked for a caress he received a blow. The blow was so well placed, and so vigorous, that at first it stunned him. Then he became unreasonably angry. He resolved to strike back.

The review of his book in the Argus was vigorously severe, and perhaps what maddened him more than anything else was the fact that, in spite of his self-esteem, he realized the truth of the criticism. If his books had been less successful, or if he had been newer as an author, he might possibly have set himself out to profit by the keen thrusts given him by the Argus. He might have remembered that although Tennyson struck back at Christopher North, calling him rusty, crusty and musty, yet the poet eliminated from later editions all blemishes which musty Christopher had pointed out.

Streeter resolved to strike back with something more tangible than a sarcastic verse. He quite admitted, even to himself, that a critic had every right to criticise—that was what he was for; but he claimed that a man who pretended to be an author's friend and who praised his books to his face had no right to go behind his back and pen a criticism so scathing as that which appeared in the Argus, for Streeter knew that Alfred Davison had written the criticism in the Argus, and Davison had pretended to be his friend; and had pretended, as well, that he had a great admiration for Streeter's books.

As Streeter walked down the Boulevard des Italiens he saw, seated in front of a cafe, the man whom he hoped to meet; and, furthermore, he was pleased to see that he had a friend with him. The recognition of author and critic was mutual.

"Hallo, Streeter!" cried Davison; "when did you come over?"

"I left London yesterday," answered Streeter.

"Then sit down and have something with us," said Davison, cordially. "Streeter, this is my friend Harmon. He is an exile and a resident in Paris, and, consequently, likes to meet his countrymen."

"In that case," said Streeter, "he is probably well acquainted with the customs of the place?"

"Rather!" returned Davison; "he has become so much of a Frenchman—he has been so contaminated, if I may put it that way—that I believe quite recently he was either principal or second in a duel. By the way, which was it, Harmon?"

"Merely a second," answered the other.

"I don't believe in dueling myself," continued Davison. "It seems to me an idiotic custom, and so futile."

"I don't agree with you," replied Streeter, curtly. "There is no reason why a duel should be futile, and there seem to be many reasons why a duel might be fought. There are many things worse than crimes, which exist in all countries, and for which there is no remedy except calling a man out: misdemeanors, if I may so term them, that the law takes no cognizance of; treachery, for instance—a person pretending to be a man's friend, and then the first chance he gets stabbing him in the back."

Harmon nodded his approval of these sentiments, while Davison said, jauntily:

"Oh, I don't know about that! It seems to me these things, which I suppose undoubtedly exist, should not be made important by taking much notice of them. What will you have to drink, Streeter?"

"Bring me a liqueur of brandy," said Streeter to the garcon who stood ready to take the order.

When the waiter returned with a small glass, into which he poured the brandy with the deftness of a Frenchman, filling it so that not a drop more could be added, and yet without allowing the glass to overflow, Streeter pulled out his purse.

"No, no!" cried Davison; "you are not going to pay for this—you are drinking with me."

"I pay for my own drinks," said Streeter, surlily.

"Not while I invite you to drink with me!" protested the critic. "I pay for this brandy."

"Very well; take it, then!" said Streeter, picking up the little glass and dashing the contents in the face of Davison.

Davison took out his handkerchief.

"What the devil do you mean by that, Streeter?" he asked, as the color mounted to his brow.

Streeter took out his card and penciled a word or two on the pasteboard.

"There," he said, "is my Paris address. If you do not know what I mean by that, ask your friend here; he will inform you."

And with that the novelist arose, bowed to the two, and departed.

When he returned to his hotel, after a stroll along the brilliantly-lighted boulevards, he found waiting for him Mr. Harmon and a Frenchman.

"I had no idea you would come so soon," said Streeter, "otherwise I would not have kept you waiting."

"It does not matter," replied Harmon; "we have not waited long. Affairs of this kind require prompt action. An insult lasts but twenty-four hours, and my friend and principal has no desire to put you to the inconvenience of repeating your action of this evening. We are taking it for granted that you have a friend prepared to act for you; for your conduct appeared to be premeditated."

"You are quite right," answered Streeter; "I have two friends to whom I shall be pleased to introduce you. Come this way, if you will be so kind."

The preliminaries were speedily arranged, and the meeting was to take place next morning at daylight, with pistols.

Now that everything was settled the prospect did not look quite so pleasant to Streeter as it had done when he left London. Davison had asked for no explanation, but that of course could be accounted for, because this critical sneak must be well aware of the reason of the insult. Still, Streeter had rather expected that he would perhaps have pretended ignorance, and on receiving enlightenment might have avoided a meeting by apologizing.

Anyhow, Streeter resolved to make a night of it. He left his friends to arrange for a carriage, and see to all that was necessary, while he donned his warpaint and departed for a gathering to which he had been invited, and where he was to meet many of his countrymen and countrywomen in a fashionable part of Paris.

His hostess appeared to be overjoyed to see him.

"You are so late," she said, "that I was afraid something had occurred that would keep you from coming altogether."

"Nothing could have prevented me from coming," said Streeter, gallantly, "where Mrs. Woodford was hostess!"

"Oh, that is very nice of you, Mr. Streeter!" answered the lady; "but I must not stand here talking with you, for I have promised to introduce you to Miss Neville, who wishes very much to meet you. She is a great admirer of yours and has read all your books."

"There are not very many of them," said Streeter, with a laugh; "and, such as they are, I hope Miss Neville thinks more of them that I do myself."

"Oh, we all know how modest authors are!" replied his hostess, leading him away to be introduced.

Miss Neville was young and pretty; and she was evidently pleased to meet the rising young author.

"I have long wanted to see you," she said, "to have a talk with you about your books."

"You are very kind," said Streeter, "but perhaps we might choose something more profitable to talk about?"

"I am not sure of that. Perhaps you have been accustomed to hear only the nice things people say about you. That is the misfortune of many authors."

"It is a misfortune," said Streeter. "What a writer needs is somebody to tell him the truth."

"Ah!" said Miss Neville, "that is another thing I am not so sure about. Mrs. Woodford has told you, I suppose, that I have read all your books. Did she add that I detested them?"

Even Streeter was not able to conceal the fact that this remark caused him some surprise. He laughed uneasily and said:

"On the contrary, Mrs. Woodford led me to believe that you had liked them."

The girl leaned back in her chair and looked at him with half-closed eyes.

"Of course," she said, "Mrs. Woodford does not know. It is not likely that I would tell her I detested your books while I asked for an introduction to you. She took it for granted that I meant to say pleasant things to you, whereas I had made up my mind to do the exact reverse. No one would be more shocked than Mrs. Woodford—unless, perhaps, it is yourself—if she knew I was going to speak frankly with you."

"I am not shocked," said the young man, seriously; "I recognize that there

"DO YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT YOU WROTE THAT REVIEW?"

are many things in my books which are blemishes."

"Of course you don't mean that," said the frank young woman; "because if you did you would not repeat the faults in book after book."

"A man can but do his best," said Streeter, getting annoyed in spite of himself, for no man takes kindly to the candid friend. "A man can but do his best, as Hubert said, whose grandsire drew a long bow at Hastings."

"Yes," returned Miss Neville, "a man can but do his best, although we should remember that the man who said that said it just before he was defeated. What I feel is that you are not doing your best, and that you will not do your best until some objectionable person like myself has a good serious talk with you."

"Begin the serious talk," said Streeter; "I am ready and eager to listen."

"Did you read the review of your latest book which appeared in the Argus?"

"Did I?" said Streeter, somewhat startled—the meeting that was so close and which was coming closer, and which he had forgotten for the moment, flashing over him. "Yes, I did; and I had the pleasure of meeting the person who wrote it this evening."

Miss Neville almost jumped in her chair.

"Oh, I did not intend that you should know that!" she said. "How did you know it? How did you know that I wrote reviews for the Argus?"

"You!" cried Streeter, astonished in his turn. "Do you mean to say that you wrote that review?"

Miss Neville sank back in her chair with a sigh.

"There!" she said, "my impetuosity has, as the Americans say, given me away. After all, you did not know that I was the writer!"

"I thought Davison was the writer. I had it on the very best authority."

"Poor Davison!" said Miss Neville, laughing, "why, he is one of the best and stanchest friends you have; and so am I for that matter—indeed, I think I am even more your friend than Mr. Davison, for I think you can do good work, while Mr. Davison is foolish enough to believe you are doing it."

At this point in the conversation Streeter looked hurriedly at his watch.

"Ah! I see," said Miss Neville; "this conversation is not to your taste. You

"WHY DON'T YOU SHOOT, GEORGE?"

are going to plead an appointment—as if anyone could have an appointment at this hour in the morning!"

"Nevertheless," said Streeter, "I have; and I must bid you good-by. But I assure you that my eyes have been opened, and that I have learned a lesson to-night which I will not soon forget. I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting you again and continuing this conversation. Perhaps some time I may tell you why I have to leave."

Streeter found his friends waiting for him. He knew it was no use trying to see Davison before the meeting. There was a long drive ahead of them, and it was gray daylight when they reached the ground and found the other party waiting.

Each man took his place and the pistol that was handed to him. When the word "fire!" was given Streeter dropped his hand to his side. Davison stood with his pistol still pointed, but he did not fire.

"Why don't you shoot, George?" said Davison.

Harmon at this point rebuked his principal, and said he must have no communication with the other except through a second.

"Oh!" said Davison, impatiently, "I don't pretend to know the rules of this idiotic game!"

Streeter stepped forward.

"I merely wished to give you the opportunity of firing at me if you cared to do so," he said; "and now I desire to apologize for my action at the cafe. I may say that I did what I did under a misapprehension. Anything that I can do to make reparation I am willing to do."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Davison; "nothing more need be said. I am perfectly satisfied. Let us get back to the city. I find it somewhat chilly out here."

"And yet," said Harmon, with a sigh, "Englishmen will have the cheek to talk of the futility of French duels!"—Robert Barr, in Detroit Free Press.

Temporarily.

"I reckon Simon Jenks hes lost his reasonin' fac'lties sence he hed that last spell o' sickness, don't you?" inquired Mr. Hanson of his gentle-faced wife.

"How old is y'r Cousin Simon?" asked placid Mrs. Hanson, who had been listening to a long story about the old gentleman's shortcomings and peculiarities since his recent illness.

"Eighty-two come next September," said Mr. Hanson, after a reflective pause.

"Oh, well, he ain't so old as he might be, by a good deal," said Mrs. Hanson, cheerfully. "I shouldn't feel to call it that folks hed lost their reasonin' fac'lties at his age, Ezry; but p'r'aps in y'r Cousin Simon's case," she added, seeing a mutinous expression on her husband's face, "p'r'aps, take it by an' large, you might say that Simon's fac'lties was mislaid for the time bein'."—Youth's Companion.

Compliment Intended.

An American is reproached with saying: "How do you do, miss?" to one of the danghters of the prince of Wales—but why not? since Mr. Gladstone always addresses her majesty as "mum." Of another American an odd story is told of his meeting with a deposed Italian princeling.

A United States minister had, with due form, presented this American to his extreme highness, the duke of Bologna.

"Ah, glad to meet you, sir," said the American; "I don't remember that I ever heard of you before, but I've long had the greatest admiration for the sausages you make in your town!"—Youth's Companion.

—Puffanblow—"I hate to be grumbling all the time about the hot weather." Phoneyboy—"I'll tell you how to cure yourself of the habit." "How?" "Start a summer hotel."—Texas Siftings.

—Mrs. Van Twiller (who mistakes Dr. Jovial for a physician)—"And where do you practice, doctor?" Rev. Dr. Jovial—"Ah, madame, I do not practice; I only preach."—Harlem Life.